CHAPTER 5

Family Life and Gendered Relations between Women

Shelly Jackson, a thirty-eight-year-old city bus driver, lives with her three children in a high-rise housing project in East New York. Her partner, Shaunte Austin, moved in with the family two years ago. Commenting on how she and her partner divide the household finances, Shelly says that regardless of sexuality, each person should bring her or his own resources to a relationship: "I don't give a damn who you're with, you always need to be able to be independent and take care of yourself." I heard echoes of Shelly's remark from the overwhelming majority of the lesbian couples to whom I spoke about finances and the division of household labor.

Studies of heterosexual family life tell us that, with few exceptions, power dynamics and gender stratification in these families are defined by men's greater earning power, in combination with gender ideologies. Even when husbands earn less than their wives, a norm of greater male power and decision-making authority is the dominant organizing principle.[1] Since the 1970s, feminist research on the division of labor in families has strongly discouraged the gender specialization model of husband as primary wage earner and wife as primary caretaker of the home, instead favoring a particular egalitarian division of labor whereby partners have joint responsibility for both breadwinning and homemaking aspects of cohabiting life (Walby 1990).[2] This model encourages both individuals to have equal concern for and commitment to the lower-status work of household organizing that has historically been relegated to women. Feminist perspectives that originated in the 1970s women's

liberation movement saw women's economic contributions through work as insufficient to raise their status within the family unit; men's equal responsibility for home life would also be necessary.[3]

In lesbian relationships, however, there is no sex difference between partners, and since most households have two earners, partners tend to be on a more even financial footing (Peplau and Fingerhut 2007). Indeed, Shelly's remark and others like it suggest that some Black lesbian couples may place a premium on one aspect of egalitarianism: financial independence. Given this context, should we also expect to find a more equal distribution of housework and child care in these households, or might different aspects of egalitarianism be more important to the well-being of these relationships? We know from contemporary research into same-sex parenthood that in lesbian families where one partner has become pregnant through alternative insemination, the lack of sex distinctions between partners tends to result in relationships wherein couples divide paid work, housework, and child care in a relatively equal way. Many of today's educated lesbians organize their family lives using the feminist egalitarian framework, meaning they seek to equalize the balance of marital power by distributing housework and child care duties across the couple using an "ethic of equality." They create relationships that reject the specialization of family roles, linking such specialization to gender inequality in heterosexual unions. While the division of tasks in lesbian-headed households is not always as equal as subjects portray their families to be, and while the biological parents in these households tend to spend more time on child care, particularly during the months immediately after birth, such lesbian couples do tend to actively discourage hierarchical relationships between partners, and they believe that neither partner should have greater authority because she has greater resources.[4]

One limitation to existing research on lesbian family formation, however, is that it is almost entirely based on the experiences of college-educated White lesbians who share an ideological commitment to having an egalitarian relationship—a commitment that originated in 1970s second-wave feminism. We do not know whether the tendency toward more egalitarian relationships exists generally among lesbian couples. It may be the case that previous studies have overrepresented families that follow these principles. Important processes around mothering may also have been obscured by data drawn disproportionately from White middle-class women with particular feminist leanings. The scholarly

focus on couples who use alternative insemination to bring children into same-sex unions tends to overlook the reality that for the majority of today's lesbian families, and particularly for Black women, children primarily enter the family through their mothers' prior heterosexual relationships, making most lesbian-headed households similar in structure to heterosexual stepfamilies.[5] Women who bear children in heterosexual unions may experience particularly gendered understandings of mothering that they take with them as they begin to parent in lesbian relationships—understandings that could have consequences for expectations of household organization and divisions of labor.

Likewise, it is worth considering how race might influence the ways in which Black lesbians approach the division of financial responsibility and household labor with their partners. Noted Black feminist Cheryl Clarke made a similar point when she argued that Black lesbians are conditioned to be self-sufficient because of their experiences of being raised in Black families so poor that they "did not have the luxury to cultivate dependence among the members of their families" (1995, 247). If we look carefully at the tenets of Black feminist thought, we see that self-reliance, autonomy, and self-actualization are key to Black women's advancement and self-liberation.[6] However, not much has been written about the equal distribution of housework and child care as avenues of Black women's liberation. This does not suggest that the equal division of household chores is not important to this population or that Black heterosexual women want to do more of the housework in their families. Rather, it suggests that other areas of inequality have been more salient for Black women, and that what is particularly important in organizing their households is the joint contribution of finances—perhaps more important than spending equal amounts of time on family chores.

We also know that historically, labor, whether paid or unpaid, voluntary or coerced, has been a distinctive characteristic of Black women's experiences in families.[7] Nevertheless, Blacks in heterosexual marriages are more likely than are White couples to bank separately and less likely to use the egalitarian money-management system of jointly controlled financial accounts.[8] The greater employment experience of Black heterosexual women and their greater use of "separate pots" rather than joint pooling systems emphasize the economic aspect of egalitarianism in Black heterosexual households. A comparison of Black and White heterosexual couples in the National Survey of Family and Households found, for example, that Black women hold more favorable attitudes

toward women's labor force participation even while holding less egalitarian attitudes toward female-typed domestic work in families (Kamo and Cohen 1998).

At the same time, women and mothers have an authoritative status in the organization of African American family life. This is partially due to the higher rates of single parenthood and greater responsibilities for child rearing among Black women, but certain aspects of African American culture also emphasize motherhood as a revered status. Gilkes (2001) illuminates the power held by women in mainline Black Christian denominations. The title of "church mother" is bestowed upon older women who have been long-standing congregants and have shown leadership and faithfulness over time. Along with this title comes a particular type of power and authority. Special seats are reserved for church mothers in Sunday services, and they are given the authority to discipline parishioners and provide guidance to worshipers. Pastors often consult with the church mothers before making important decisions because church mothers maintain such a powerful influence over key congregants.[9] The status of "mother" in Black family life, therefore, might influence decision making in households headed by lesbians raised in predominantly Black contexts. If African American lesbians organize family life in ways that are consistent with Black heterosexual households, we should expect to see high levels of economic independence between both partners, but we should not necessarily expect this financial independence to be accompanied by an expectation to equally distribute all of the household chores and child care.

All of these perspectives on the organization of Black family labor suggest a need to reevaluate the social organization of Black lesbian households. Family process, household organization, and the division of labor are analyzed in this chapter to determine the way this population of Black same-sex couples structures bargaining and decision making in the home. I focus on the seventy-four respondents who were living in couple households at the time of my fieldwork. Thirty-two are in stepfamilies, eight had children together using alternative insemination, and thirty-four are cohabiting with no children in the home. Drawing from field notes wherein I observed the interactions among these couples inside their homes and in various social settings, their responses to questions on the survey, their responses to questions during the in-person individual interviews, and the perspectives shared in the focus group on family and relationship dynamics, I show that Shelly's comment that "You always need to be independent and take care of yourself" has great

resonance in Black lesbian-headed households. Economic independence, rather than the egalitarian distribution of household chores, is the primary feminist organizing mechanism in these families, and the different emphasis of Black lesbians relative to the White middle-class gay women represented in most previous studies can be traced to the different goals of lesbian-feminism and Black feminist ideologies. I also point to the importance of the status of "mother" as an alternative mechanism creating hierarchies in stepfamily households where partners are not differentiated by sex (see also Moore 2008). Finally, I argue that gendered presentations of self in Black lesbian relationships are associated with some of the household tasks partners take on in the home.

MEASURING EGALITARIAN IDEOLOGIES AND BEHAVIOR

To measure egalitarian ideologies and behavior, I first considered whether the women in this work expect both partners to co-provide, which would be consistent with the literature on lesbian-headed families, or if one partner tends to possess the greater economic responsibility to the family, as we see in heterosexual couples. The data show that both partners are likely to be employed: 84 percent of women in cohabiting relationships are working or in school full-time. Dual employment was important to the women I studied. When asked what characteristics she looks for in a partner, Ro Gaul (b. 1966) gave a response that was typical of the working-class women in the study: "They have to be working because I'm extremely independent, and I believe everybody should work. I grew up as a young child working, and I am still working. So I believe that you must have a job. If it means that the job is paying you enough for you to maintain yourself or your own independence, you have to be working." Carlie Lewis is a hairstylist who lives with her partner of three years, Berit Fontaine. They have no children. When asked how they divide the bills and deal with household finances, Carlie answered bluntly: "I love her to death and trust her more than any female I've ever known. [But] she ain't getting' my check. You know what I'm saying? And I don't want her check. You work for your money. As long as you take care of responsibilities we got in the house, I don't care what you do with your money."

Class backgrounds and experiences growing up provide different explanations for why self-sufficiency is so important to the women in my study.[10] Women raised in working-class families encourage economic

independence because they tend to see everyone in the household as having an equal responsibility to bring in financial resources to help the family get ahead; they also want to have the income necessary to escape unstable or unhealthy relationships. Middle-class lesbians tend to view economic independence as important in their relationships because they have seen how the presence or absence of their own mother's employment facilitated or hindered her personal growth and self-actualization. For example, Dr. Renee Martin, a high-ranking physician at a major metropolitan hospital, discusses the importance of financial independence for her partner Naja Rhodes, a social worker, in terms of how to help Naja achieve greater independence and fulfillment in her own career. Renee was born in 1967 and raised with her younger sister in a Black middle-class neighborhood in New Orleans. Her father was one of the first African Americans to receive a doctorate in Chemical Engineering. After having two children, Renee's mother continued to work as a college professor, recently retiring after achieving the rank of associate dean. Although Renee's father earned more than her mother, throughout her childhood she witnessed her mother in a middle-class occupation that she found personally fulfilling.

Renee's discussion of financial independence does not mention economic survival or a worry about being able to provide for herself in the absence of an employed partner. These issues are not part of how she envisions her life nor are they part of her past experiences. Coming from a socioeconomically secure background and having a high status and lucrative occupation precludes Renee from many of the same worries expressed by working-class women. She could easily take on the traditional provider role in her relationship, relieving Naja from any obligation to contribute financially to the household. Instead, Renee's discussion of egalitarianism in her relationship involves helping her partner achieve greater independence and fulfillment in her career. Renee encourages Naja to own her own property and has shown her how to build wealth. Renee's interest in financial independence for herself and her mate is motivated by middle- and upper-middle-class outlooks and experiences.

While all of the couples reported sharing responsibility for household bills, just 57 percent of them actually shared a bank account. Partners value self-sufficiency and autonomy, and these values get transmitted in the relationship through the maintenance of separate financial accounts. Control over their own finances allows both partners to claim a co-provider role even when their incomes are not equal. It also makes it easier for the partners to exit the relationship in case of dissolution.

Consider the experience of Marilyn Richards, president of a national nonprofit organization. When asked whether partners should pool all of their assets in a relationship, she emphatically disagreed, saying: "We have our own money, our own accounts, and we have household funds that we use to do the lawn, the snow removal. . . . We met as fully-formed adults with other obligations in our lives. I think that we should pool the assets [for things] that we want to do together like [buy] a home, a car, which we do, a savings together for things. She is my beneficiary along with my son, and I am hers along with her children, so that is pooling out in the afterlife, so to speak. But she doesn't ask me how I spend my money, and I don't ask her how she spends hers. She has a job—and a very responsible one—and we have our own discretionary income."

Marilyn's comment mentions a notion of "pooling to build up," or combining income to reach a common goal, such as the purchase of a home. But it also demonstrates a strong interest in preserving financial independence—an emphasis that the survey data also reflect, particularly among women who are the biological mothers of children. This interest persists even when they contribute fewer financial assets than their partners and would receive the greater economic benefit from comingling funds. Relative to their partners, biological mothers (bio-moms) in stepfamilies were less likely to agree with the statement, "The two mates should pool all their property and financial assets." Responses in the in-depth interviews suggest that this hesitancy stems in part from many bio-moms' having navigated a history of relationship transitions and cohabiting partners while raising their children. The majority of the bio-moms bore children in past heterosexual relationships, spending time as single mothers and sole economic providers for their children prior to cohabiting in their lesbian relationships. Their past experiences influence how those who have created lesbian stepfamilies organize the household finances.

For example, Adina Montany, an artist, shares a very comfortable home in a New Jersey suburb with her partner, Dr. Beverly Howard, a physician, and Beverly's one-year-old daughter. Adina has been in other cohabiting relationships and has adopted a philosophy toward comingling assets that reveals both a belief that couples should jointly participate in building assets and a wariness of the difficulties of disentangling comingled resources in the event of a breakup. Even though Adina brings considerably fewer assets to the relationship than Beverly, she believes it is in her best interest to maintain her financial autonomy. She says: "If you are really in love with the person that you're with, and you're really

willing to share, then you can share out of your own account. You know, there are things that you can do that don't require you to get all that paperwork that makes it hard to get out of when you separate or if you separate."

Not only do the majority of Black lesbians in this study value economic independence for themselves, they also find it an important characteristic in their mates. While they accept as reasonable their partners' taking time off from work for a career change or additional schooling, they feel that work instability or the prolonged absence of employment causes problems in a relationship and constitutes a "deal breaker." When asked how happy she is with the way she and her partner, Shaunte, divide household responsibilities, Shelly comments that she is happier in the relationship now that her partner has found a job: "Don't get me wrong. She has always been so good to me as far as helping me out with the kids, 'cause my hours is crazy and Shaunte is somebody I could depend on. But it was hard when she wasn't working. She wasn't having no income coming in, and I was like, 'I'm not your sugar mama!' " This final comment emphasizes Shelly's expectation that Shaunte will contribute economically to the home at the same time that it draws on negative images of women's dependence on a male "sugar daddy." Shelly later said that when Shaunte was unemployed, she would have dinner ready for Shelly, would help the children with their homework when Shelly was at work, and would put the children to bed when Shelly worked late hours. While Shelly acknowledged and appreciated Shaunte's work around the home, it did not compensate for her lack of financial resources.

Previous studies have not analyzed well the feminist principle of economic independence in lesbian relationships, emphasizing instead those ideologies related to the division of housework and child care. My survey asked three opinion questions to measure the strength of egalitarian attitudes among partnered women in the study: "Both mates in a relationship should divide evenly the household tasks (washing dishes, preparing meals, doing laundry, etc.)," "If both mates work full-time, both of their career plans should be considered equally in determining where they will live," and "It is better if one person in the relationship takes the major financial responsibility and the other person takes the major responsibility of caring for the home." Each respondent was also asked how often she, relative to her partner, was responsible for thirteen different household chores, and she was also asked to report how many hours per week she and her partner each spent on household chores.

Responses to these questions show that the majority of respondents profess views that are consistent with feminist measures of equality or egalitarianism in relationships. Eight-four percent agreed or strongly agreed that both mates should divide household tasks evenly, 89 percent agreed or strongly agreed that both partners' career plans should be equally considered when making decisions about where to live, and 84 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with the specialization model of one person taking on the major financial responsibility and the other person primarily caring for the home. In face-to-face interviews, I asked respondents how they divided housework and finances and how satisfied they were with their current arrangements. I also spent afternoons at the homes of some respondents, observing them as they prepared for birthdays or dinner parties, taking notes on the actual work each person performed, how they talked about the work they each put into the events, how they felt about the work their partners performed, and how satisfied they were with these arrangements.

Despite their ideological agreement with feminist egalitarian principles, when it came to carrying out the daily chores, the respondents did not actually behave in egalitarian ways.[11] The data show clear indications of specialization, particularly in households with children: the biological mothers in these families tend to perform more of the household organizing tasks, assume responsibility for making sure various chores and activities are implemented smoothly, and see the household and the efficiency with which it is run as a representation of themselves as good partners to their mates and as good mothers. In families with children, one person tends to spend much more time performing household chores. While this is sometimes a source of frustration for the partner who does more housework, it is not the primary source of conflict in their relationships and it is not the primary measure of whether they believe their relationships to be fair. Self-sufficiency and autonomy are highly valued, and respondents place a premium on economic independence rather than the division of family labor as a value and behavior that is critical for relationship satisfaction.

In lesbian stepfamilies, the bio-mom assumes more of the responsibility for household chores. Bio-moms in these households tend to perform the time-consuming and female-stereotyped chores more often than their partners. Thirty-two percent of survey respondents reported spending equal amounts of time washing dishes, while 48 percent said that bio-moms spent more time on this task and only 20 percent said that

TABLE 1. DIVISION OF LABOR IN LESBIAN STEPFAMILIES: CERTAIN HOUSEHOLD TASKS ARE NECESSARY TO KEEP THINGS RUNNING SMOOTHLY. WHO DOES EACH OF THESE TASKS MORE OFTEN?[1]

Household Chores	We Do This Equally (%)	Bio-Mom Does This More (%)	Partner Does This More (%)
Washes dishes	32	48	20
Does laundry	36	52	13
Cleans bathroom	16	64	16
Cleans floors	6	73	21
Arranges daily meals	23	39	32
Straightens family room	16	67	15
Dusts furniture	16	75	8
Grocery shopping	34	24	42
Mixes drinks for company	30	52	18
Takes out trash	25	18	56
Repairs things around house	14	48	37
Cares for pets	20	32	48
Performs yard work	18	32	54

[1] These questions are modified from those in Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) and Cowan and Cowan's "Who Does What" scales (1990). It contains five possible responses ranging from 1 (*She does this much more*) to 5 (*I do this much more*). In my data analysis, the measure was collapsed into three categories: 1 (*She does this more*); 2 (*We do this equally*); and 3 (*I do this more*).

the bio-mom's partner spent more time washing dishes (see Table 1 for detailed responses regarding the division of household tasks). When asked how much time each person spent on household chores, on separate surveys respondents from the same households tended to agree that the bio-mom spent much more time each week on chores than did her partner, at an average of 11.4 hours per week versus the partner's 5.2 hours. Partners on average reported spending 4.4 hours per week on chores relative to the bio-mom's 12.1 hours per week.[12] In research on two-earner heterosexual couples, husbands have tended to undercount the amount of time their wives spend on housework (Ferree 1991). In this study, however, lesbian partners perceived bio-moms as spending *more* time each week on housework than bio-moms reported for themselves, suggesting a greater acknowledgment of or respect for work around the home that has traditionally been defined as women's work.

The bio-moms who take care of the daily cleaning needs of the home (i.e., cooking, dishes, general cleaning, and straightening of rooms) complained about the imbalance and criticized the way their partners completed the tasks they have usually assigned to them. The response of

Dana Russell, the bio-mom of seventeen-year-old Marina, in reference to her partner, Angie Russell, is typical: "Am I happy with it? She don't do nothing! [laughs] But it wasn't an issue. She'll do the laundry or she'll go to the grocery store or take me, which is important, because I can't carry things because I hurt my back. We've always done the laundry together, pretty much. We've always done the food shopping together. Anything around the house, I've got to kind of bitch to get her to do stuff." There is some evidence here that bio-moms, as household organizers, can delegate to their partners the chores they want them to perform. Dana acknowledges that her partner, Angie, performs less housework, and her comments suggest this is both a problem ("I've got to kind of bitch to get her to do stuff") and something she accepts about the relationship ("She don't do nothing! [laughs] But it wasn't an issue").

I repeatedly found this inconsistency both in the interview data and in my observational notes. Bio-moms expressed frustration about the unequal amounts of time partners were allotting to household chores, but they also expressed an acceptance, often accompanied by a modest boasting about their superior cleaning and organizational skills, which called for them to continue to have the final say over those areas of family life. Consider this exchange that I had with Jocelyn Barnum in reference to her partner, Joi Jamison:

I: Are you happy with the way you and your partner divide household responsibilities? How does that work in your relationship?

Jocelyn: I mean, she steps up to the plate. I'm the domestic person, I do the cooking, I do the laundry. She does the cleaning, we both do the cleaning. I think I do more of the household stuff though, and sometimes I just want her to probably do more without me having to ask her. Let me just say this in her defense though, she will say to me, "Oh, I'll do the dishes," and I'll say, "Oh no, I've got it," because sometimes I just think I wash dishes faster than her. So instead of her standing over the sink for an hour, we can have more quality time. So she does volunteer to do it, and I'll say, "Oh no, I'll do it."

I: Are you happy with the way the household is run?

Jocelyn: Yes. (pauses) Yes.

Jocelyn is a professional woman who owns her own educational consulting firm and is the bio-mom of Issim, her seventeen-year-old son. Despite her professional identity, she identifies herself as "the domestic

person" in her relationship with Joi. On separate surveys, both Jocelyn and Joi reported that Joi spends eight hours per week on housework. Jocelyn says she spends seventeen hours on chores, while Joi says Jocelyn devotes forty hours each week to chores. Looking more closely at the meaning behind the division of labor in these stepfamilies, I found that bio-moms accept the greater responsibility for various aspects of household organization not because they like washing dishes or cleaning the living room but because having control over those areas allows them to also have a strong say, and sometimes the deciding voice, in other aspects of the family that are important to them, particularly money management and child rearing.

MONEY MANAGEMENT, CHILD-REARING CONFLICTS, AND THE STRENGTH OF THE HOUSEHOLD ORGANIZER POSITION

Sonjee Montag, the mother of two teenage boys, recalls the financial powerlessness she felt many years ago after leaving the father of her children, who had been the family's sole economic provider. She granted temporary custody of her sons to their grandmother until she was able to get back on her feet and re-enter the labor force. While her current partner, Corey James, gets along well with her children, Sonjee is emphatic about being the money manager for the household. When asked if she is happy with the way she and Corey divide financial responsibilities, Sonjee said: "I can tell you right now, Corey cannot financially manage money. I manage the money in this household, only simply because Corey knows my first priority is my sons, but my next after that is my damn bills. I do not play when it comes to the bills. Corey knows if I'm down to my last, I will pay a bill."

Sonjee's comment suggests the critical importance that money management can take on for women in lesbian stepfamilies. Pahl's (1983) research on the allocation of money makes a distinction among the control, management, and budgeting of money as three distinct points in the flow of financial resources through the household. I find that at the point where money first enters the family, both partners in lesbian stepfamilies *negotiate* how the money will be allocated, meaning they decide together how much money will be needed to pay the bills each month and how much of their own funds each person will contribute toward these expenses. But biological mothers usually take the lead in *managing*, or putting into operation, the allocative system the couple

has adopted. This includes the more detailed work of deciding how much money will be apportioned for each expenditure (e.g., how much they will spend on groceries or how much will go toward credit card debt). The bio-mom makes sure bills are actually paid and that there is enough money to fuel the car or to pay for new shoes for the child. The bio-mom is also usually in charge of *budgeting*, or the more time-consuming work of deciding which foods to buy, whether the children need new clothes for the first day of school, whether the family should have the premium or standard cable TV package, and the like.

Consider the Adams family. Anita and Trina Adams share a small two-bedroom apartment in Harlem with Anita's two daughters. Anita did not finish college, while Trina is a college graduate and earns about $12,000 more per year than Anita. Anita and Trina pool their money for household expenses, but Anita writes out the checks and makes sure the bills are paid. Anita primarily draws from her own income to support her daughters and from time to time will divert household money to school clothes or holiday gifts, instructing Trina to assume more financial responsibility for the monthly bills. Anita is more likely to factor the needs of the children into the family's financial decisions and is more outwardly concerned with how the distribution of finances will affect the girls.

When I asked Trina how she and Anita divide household chores, she said, "Well, I do the laundry. I cook, I clean up, but it's like I'm very sporadic. Anita will kick my boots or something, or she'll go [makes a sound like she's clearing her throat] and she'll look at the living room, and I'll start cleaning it. But she definitely does the chores way more than I do." On separate surveys, both Anita and Trina reported that Anita performs more of the daily tasks like washing dishes, straightening the rooms, and emptying the trash, while Trina participates more equally in tasks that are less frequent, like the grocery shopping and laundry. They both report that Anita spends twice as much time per week on household chores.

Relying on the survey data alone might lead one to the conclusion that Trina has more authority in the relationship: she has more education and a higher salary than Anita, carries fewer family responsibilities, and gets away with doing less work around the home. Because Anita is the bio-mom and was a single mother prior to meeting Trina, she might be thought of as the person bringing more baggage into the relationship. The qualitative data, however, suggest that the decisions Anita makes actually carry more weight in the family. Trina moved into a household

that was already established by Anita, so in this sense Trina is the new addition and must adapt to a structure that already has Anita as the leader and organizer. Anita is the money manager and makes the decisions about how to allocate family finances, including Trina's own personal wants and needs. Anita enjoys having this type of authority: in her interview, she proudly told me, "I'm the bill keeper. She [Trina] gives the finances, I stay on the bills. I'm like 'Look, this is due.' And it works out pretty good. We have a good little system going on with the bills."

Anita's position in the family does impose more constraints on her time, and she expresses frustration over the additional hours she spends on household chores. But while Anita may want her partner to do more work around the house, she does not want Trina to assume more child-rearing responsibilities or more influence over how their money is spent. Anita's control over the family's finances allows her to decide how much of their funds each month will go to bills, the children's needs, and her and Trina's own personal wants and needs. Because the allocation of money toward family expenditures is not done jointly but rather is primarily performed by Anita, Anita's decisions play a significant role in determining the proportion of Trina's paycheck that Trina has left over for her own leisure activities. Anita has a full-time job, and her family was functioning before she met Trina, so while Trina is an important co-provider (her income enabled the family to move out of their apartment into a house that Trina and Anita eventually purchased together), the utility of her economic contributions is tempered by the knowledge that the family can survive without her.

The lesbian family literature says couples jointly make decisions about how money will be spent because control in this arena is a sign of a more fundamental power that neither person thinks one partner should assume on her own. The literature on heterosexual family life says that having the responsibility for the daily task of money management is the lower-status position, and that the person with the greater economic resources is able to "buy" his way out of having to do this work and has the power to challenge and even "veto" his wife's decisions. Note that here we see a difference in the literatures in how this position is conceptualized, with lesbian partners acknowledging control over household decisions as a sign of authority in their relationships, while in the literature on heterosexual couples the job of money manager is perceived more as an undesired task or responsibility that the male partner gets to "hand off" to his wife, only to take up again whenever he feels it necessary. I would argue that the difference in how lesbian and heterosexual

couples interpret the position of money manager is linked to women's greater attention to and interest in what Kranichfeld (1987) defines as "family power." Kranichfeld conceives of family power not as the acquisition of resources and status outside of the family but as skills that facilitate or advance an individual's ability to relate to others within the family. This type of power is "complex, enduring and significant" (42), and it is structured around the parent-child relationship rather than the partner dyad.

Unlike in heterosexual households, where husbands are often granted the opportunity to pass family decision making over to their wives, in lesbian relationships bio-moms are largely not assigned the task of household organizer. Instead, bio-moms want and take control over this activity because it more directly involves the needs and considerations of the children, and they have the greater motivation to make sure the children are properly cared for. While doing more housework is not evidence of greater authority or status in the home, in lesbian stepfamilies the returns from doing more housework include a greater say over how money should be allocated in other areas of family life.

MOTHERHOOD IDENTITY AND GENDER CONSTRUCTION

When Jocelyn and Anita each speak of their own identities, they place great importance on being mothers. They see their status as mother as being more salient and a greater part of their identities than their status as gay. Both say that even though they felt same-sex desire at an earlier point in time, they waited until after they had children to act on that attraction. Their intentions to be a "good mother" mean that they are willing—that they even expect—to control household activities, because taking care of work around the home is part of how one constructs an identity as a good mother. A good mother should not have a house that is messy, her kids should be fed and look presentable, and she should create a schedule to coordinate these activities.

How a woman views her own identity as a mother and as a lesbian depends in part on the timing of her transition into these statuses. As I argued in Chapter 4, women who have clearly established lesbian identities and have formed unions with other women before making the transition to motherhood may begin their parenting with particular understandings or belief systems about their own and their partners' responsibilities toward their children. That they bore the children in

unions with women instead of with men may influence how they interpret each adult's relationship to the others in the home. In contrast, many women who had children before coming out as gay tend to identify first and foremost as mothers, ranking their status as lesbians lower in their personal identity construction.[13] In the lesbian stepfamilies they create, one partner has a more clearly defined identity as the mother and primary childrearer. Her ownership of that status creates a context that facilitates the repeated production of a particular gendered identity performance in her relations with her partner. She might assert control over certain family tasks as a way to remain consistent with societal expectations of what it means to be a good wife/female partner and mother, especially when those tasks relate to the well-being of the child.

Bio-moms in lesbian relationships may find that their identity as mothers is less salient to others than it was when they were partnered with men, and some may feel correspondingly compelled to show others and themselves that they have constructed their gender in a way that is appropriate for mothers and that reflects "gendered norms of accountability" (Erickson 2005).[14] Essentialist views of biological motherhood might be particularly salient for women who began parenting in a heterosexual context or who did not initially share parenting responsibilities with a female partner. If to be a good mother means that one has the greater responsibility for the implementation of child-rearing decisions or the final say in evaluating the ways household chores are carried out, the performance of this work will remain central to how women—even women with same-sex desire—construct a gendered sense of self.

Kranichfeld (1987) argues that mothers use social power to control their families, to shape the lives of their children, and to maintain family cohesion. If this is true, the power that mothers derive from within their families is a gender-related factor that complicates the lives of stepmothers (Coleman, Troilo, and Jamison 2008). The enduring power of biological mothers has consequences for stepmothers' authority. In lesbian stepfamilies, the partners of bio-moms often want more say over child rearing and expect to have some parenting authority because they are partners, because they are women, and because they are adults living in the household. But even when a couple decides at the onset of the relationship what each person's responsibility to the children will be (i.e., whether the partner will fulfill a parenting role or merely act as an adult friend toward the children), biological mothers always have the option of overriding prior contracts and having the final word. The bio-mom also has more say because in the event of a split in the relationship

she has the authority to decide whether and how much visitation her partner can have with the children.

One summer during the early stages of my field work, I attended a surprise birthday party for Ro Gaul hosted by her partner, Sifa Brody. The party was held at the Vulcan Society in Brooklyn, which is part of the Black Firefighter's Association of New York City. The people at the party were predominantly West Indian, with a few Black Americans in attendance. (Both Ro and Sifa are Jamaican.) The people there were gay men and lesbians; I do not know who Ro worked with to host her event at this venue, since she is not a firefighter. At the party, I ran into Laverne Taylor, whom I thought lived with her partner and their four children. When I approached Laverne about participating in the survey component of the study, she said she was not eligible because she and her partner had ended their relationship. I asked why, and she said it was because her partner "spoils" her children, and sometimes Laverne disagreed with how she handled the discipline. She said this was a problem that kept coming up. I asked, "So you broke up because she spoils her children?" And Laverne responded, "Well, we broke up because she wouldn't let me make any of the decisions in the house when it came to the kids." At the time, I did not make much of her comments. It was not until I conducted a focus group on household decision making and all of the couples with children repeatedly focused on this area of home life as the major source of conflict in their families that I began to recognize the seriousness of this issue and the potential influence gendered ideologies about motherhood might have in the structure of lesbian-headed families.

When I compared the behaviors of the lesbian stepfamilies in this study to the research on heterosexual stepfamilies, I observed interesting parallels. Relative to wives in first marriages, women in heterosexual stepfamilies were more likely to be employed and more likely to have separate financial accounts (Coleman and Ganong 1989). O'Connor and Insabella's (1999) study of mother-stepfather families showed that biological mothers assumed greater child-rearing responsibilities than their partners and had more authority over decisions regarding children living in the home. Relative to biological mothers, stepfathers in remarried households were more likely to show a disengaged parenting style characterized by low levels of involvement, control over stepchildren's behavior, parental monitoring, and discipline (Hetherington and Clingempeel 1992). Men's family roles are narrower, and the cultural conceptualization of good fathers allows for more distant involvement with children. The parameters around child

rearing that biological mothers set for stepfathers can produce strain in the marital relationship, but relative to women who are stepparenting, men expect to have less active involvement in day-to-day, minute child-rearing activities.

Biological fathers in father-stepmother households tend not to provide the same high levels of caregiving as do biological mothers in stepfamilies. Instead, child care tends to be gendered, with stepmothers experiencing more pressure to have primary responsibility for child rearing and other time-consuming activities normally undertaken by the biological mother (Cherlin and Furstenburg 1994).[15] Stepmothers spend more time in close proximity to stepchildren, participate more often in the day-to-day aspects of parenting, and become more involved in specific dilemmas around housework and caregiving compared to stepfathers (Ambert 1986; Nielsen 1999). Particularly when stepfamilies are first formed, parenting from the nonbiological parent is best received when performed at a distance, especially in relationships with adolescents (Bray and Kelly 1998). This arrangement may work better for men who as father-figures have a more acceptable place as the less involved parent. But for the female stepparent, being asked to take on a more emotionally distant parental identity can lead to conflict because even though parents may have gendered expectations around parenting, the children often do not accept parenting from the stepmother. This produces discrepancies between the father's gendered expectations of the stepmother and what the children in the household will accept.

In the case of Anita and Trina, Trina does not have an identity as a mother. Yet as the adult partner to Anita, she expects to have a greater say in the area of parenting than Anita will grant her. Trina says: "I look at it like [this]: I'm your significant other, and I'm not going anywhere, and I'm going to be here until you die. Now I have some say because I'm here, you know I pay bills, I help with everything, I'm a mentor to her, to her daughter. . . . Don't get offended if I say something, it is out of care and concern." Trina's interest in being involved with the parenting is more like that of a stepmother than that of a stepfather, but what Anita seems to expect of her is more of a stepfather's role. This creates conflict over the duties each adult presumes she will perform because the biomoms are looking for their partners to interact with their children with a disengaged parenting style that is typical of stepfathers, whereas the partners are attempting to fulfill more of a stepmother role, and research has shown that the two positions function quite differently.

In a dispute between Trina and Anita's oldest daughter, Kiyana, Anita was called on to decide who was right and who was wrong. Anita did not come down firmly on either person's side, and this caused a heated argument with Trina, who believed Anita should have supported her because she is the adult. Anita said she would take Kiyana aside and tell her the things she did right and the things she did wrong. According to Anita, Trina would rather Anita "start yelling and screaming in front of Kiyana," but Anita said she could not do that. She believes that a good mother should "defend her child," and she has a difficult time doing this while simultaneously letting the child know when she is behaving inappropriately. Referring back to how the dispute between Trina and Kiyana was settled, Anita said: "Even if Trina is rebellious and she don't want to hear it, it'll come to a head where she'll say, 'O.K., now I understand what you're saying.' And the same thing with Kiyana, she rebels, after awhile she will see, and it will come to a head." Even the language Anita uses ("Trina is rebellious") suggests that her partner and her daughter have the same lower status relative to her.

In considering how a similar scenario might play out in a heterosexual stepfamily, one might imagine analogous efforts by the biological mother to "protect" her child from the stepparent's wrath. However, stepfathers often compensate for the bio-mom's greater authority in child rearing by contributing the greater financial resources. Studies show that on average, stepfathers work more hours and have higher incomes than their wives.[16] Stepfathers also receive social rewards for assuming financial responsibility for another man's biological children, and they can enter a legally sanctioned union with the mother that also provides a legal relationship with the child. In lesbian stepfamilies, however, the bio-mom's partner rarely has a legal parental role, and she therefore has a harder time establishing her authority in the family or gaining status from her attempts to care for the child. Lesbian partners also do not gain any gender advantage in the labor market and experience more difficulty compensating for their secondary parenting role through greater economic contributions to the family.

Conflict is to be expected in stepfamilies, and it can be productive or destructive, depending on how it is managed. Loyalty conflicts, in which children attempt to create divisions between their custodial parent and the stepparent, are particularly common (Coleman et al. 2001). Experts say the best way to combat this type of conflict is for the adults to communicate the importance and permanence of the marital bond to the

children (Kelley 1995). However, the majority of lesbian relationships lack the security and permanence of the marital bond.

Consider the Russells. For the past four and a half years, Angie and Dana Russell have shared a life together with Dana's daughter, Marina, in a Black middle-class neighborhood in Queens. In Angie's interview, she presented the reality of raising the child of a lesbian partner: "As a nonbiological, it's not your child. When it comes down to the bottom line, if anything happens to this biological parent, the grandparents get first dibs. You see plenty cases of that. Even when women raise children from newborns, Grandma comes in and says [to the biological mother's partner] 'No, no, I loved you and we was cool at Thanksgiving, but no, this is my daughter's child, and I want to raise her. Yeah, I know she called you mommy too, but *no*.' And that's the bottom line. That's the reality of it, that's the disadvantage of it I guess."

That at the "bottom line" there is no legal relationship between the partner and the stepchild makes the partner's position in the family less certain and less permanent. In separate interviews, both Angie and Dana described Angie's deteriorating relationship with Marina. Dana stated that she is reluctant to allow Angie significant authority in parenting despite the fact that Marina's biological father is deceased: "I tried to make it comfortable for both of them so Angie could feel she's a part of Marina's life. . . . We took family vacations, we'd do family things. But she [Marina] was raised already, so someone really can't come in and have a lot of input. *I didn't even allow it*."[17] Research has shown that when biological mothers identify strongly with possessive, exclusive notions of motherhood, stepmothers have little chance of developing close relationships with their stepchildren (Nielsen 1999). Jones (2004) describes the parenting experiences of stepmothers as "caregiving without authority," because in her study of heterosexual stepmothers the women reported that their authority as parents was often undermined by the children's biological mother. Stepfamilies that are successful in making the transition to "family" are able to develop and maintain flexible boundaries as they merge together. Households that are unable to successfully negotiate their family ties have boundaries that "become extremely rigid and impermeable, demarcating bloodlines" (Braithwaite et al. 2001, 241). In these situations, parents and children from one family align with one another, creating distance from their new stepfamily members.

Angie said she participated in some of the child care responsibilities when Marina was younger, but this changed as Marina got older. After

a time, Angie said, she just stopped offering advice, asking questions, and generally involving herself in Marina's parenting. She says she felt "cut off" from this aspect of family life and powerless to do anything to change her position. Not only did the relationship between Angie and Marina suffer from this distancing, but the relationship between Angie and Dana suffered as well. The opinions of biological mothers are likely to carry more weight in lesbian relationships because of the way these families are often formed. In this study, two-thirds of the lesbian stepfamilies were created when the mother's partner moved into an existing single-parent household that had the bio-mom as family head. The bio-moms often continue parenting as though they are single mothers, deciding when to give authority to the new cohabiting partner and how much to give. The partner's place in the family hierarchy is less clear, and the uncertainty surrounding her position gives her an initial status that is lower than that of her partner.

The pattern of behavior that emerges in many lesbian stepfamilies is one in which the child resists the authority of her mother's partner, and the biological mother also resists, undermines, or challenges her partner's parenting attempts, aligning herself with her child even when she may agree with her partner's parenting recommendations. When Anita Adams talks about the dynamics of her partner's relationship with her older daughter, she says she sees herself as caught in the middle of two people whom she loves and who each expect her to take their side. She describes this tension as "a conflict of love." Marilyn Richards says that the role of the biological mother is "to defend your child and be a peacemaker with your partner." Richards acknowledges, "It is a very difficult balance to maintain the love you have for your children and the love you have for your partner and trying to keep them getting along and limit the child's resentment or the partner's resentment for the kid."

One interesting question that these results invite is what happens in families in which both partners bring biological children from prior relationships to live together in the home. Unfortunately, my surveys and interviews did not capture any families of this type. This may attest to the difficulties of forming cohabiting relationships when both partners are parenting children. Single mothers who were dating other single mothers tended to retain their own separate residences. During my three years of field work, however, I came across two cohabiting couples wherein both women were parenting children from prior heterosexual relationships. In these households, both adults were working, and each parent retained authority over decisions regarding her own children. There was still

some task specialization, in that one partner had the greater responsibility for the allocation of finances and the housework. Other factors determined who would take on the job of household organizer in these cases, however, such as flexibility of work schedule and the age and needs of each person's biological child.

Lesbian stepfamilies in which there is a severe discrepancy in income or in which one partner is not economically self-sufficient may also operate in a different way than the dominant model discussed in this chapter. In this study, the personal incomes of both partners in the majority of families was fairly matched, so even when one person had a greater income, her additional earnings did not translate into more authority in the relationship.[18] In two households, however, the bio-mom's partner had an income more than three times higher than hers.[19] In both of these families, the mother's partner had accumulated significantly more assets prior to union formation, and the biological mother had a weak attachment to the labor force. The bio-moms and their children lived in their partners' homes, whereas in most of the stepfamilies I studied, the partner joined the mother and child in the bio-mom's previously established home. These two cases suggest that in families where the bio-mom has significantly fewer material assets and resources, including a lower or unsteady income, her status as the biological mother still gives her greater authority over child rearing, but her opinions do not carry as much weight in the area of family finances. In relationships in which one partner earns much more than the other or one partner is not self-sufficient, the more economically advantaged person has greater overall say in the household despite her lesser influence over the children.

DIVISION OF LABOR IN OTHER COHABITING HOUSEHOLDS

Two other types of cohabiting unions are represented in my study—couples who have had children together using alternative insemination methods and couples who do not have children living with them in the home—and it is useful to compare the pattern of household decision making in lesbian stepfamilies to them. In my sample, eight women (four couples) conceived children together through alternative insemination methods. These families were middle and upper middle class. They supported the ideology of equal financial contributions and equal housework and child care but did not practice an equal division of

household labor. Similar to the lesbian stepfamilies, partners who did less housework tended to make jokes and laugh uncomfortably when asked about the division of chores. This, for instance, is what Zora Hammond had to say in reference to her partner, Nyla Ransom:

I: So you're pretty happy with it [the division of housework] the way you've described it?

Zora: Well, it's not fair. Nyla does most of the work, and I don't do a lot of it.

I: And she allows that?

Zora: She does! Since I've known Nyla, she has always cleaned. People used to say in college, "Why are you cleaning up Zora's messy room, let her clean up her own room." And it's like she set this wheel in motion, so it's her fault, isn't it? Thank you, I no longer feel guilty!" [laughter]

In two of these families, the bio-moms performed more of the housework and managed the money. In a third couple, both partners were bio-moms, but one took on a much larger share of the household chores. In the fourth, the co-mother performed more of the housework than the bio-mom. In all of these families, the bio-mom's partner was either the legal adoptive parent of the children or in the process of adopting the child.

Unlike in lesbian stepfamilies, mothers in three of the four households where children were conceived through alternative insemination co-parented and shared in authority and decision making.[20] Rather than undermining their partners' efforts, bio-moms found it important to validate them as legitimate co-mothers of the children. Marissa Dillard and Josephine Owens, for example, are both attorneys who jointly own an apartment in an upper-middle-class neighborhood in Brooklyn. They have a six-year-old son named Jonathan whom Marissa conceived through alternative insemination. When I interviewed her, Marissa was six months pregnant with their second child. Josephine is the legal parent of Jonathan and planned to adopt the new baby as well. In neither of their interviews did they speak of Jonathan as "mine" or "my child." Instead, they both used words and phrases like "ours," "the kids," and "We provide for them." When asked whether they ever disagreed on how to parent Jonathan, Marissa said that in the past they had "eventually come to a consensus" despite their different disciplinary styles by "talk[ing] about it and tr[ying] to find some sort of middle ground that we both feel comfortable with."

In these families, when one partner had a greater say in a decision regarding the child, it was not always the biological mother. One reason the biological tie does not confer a higher status for partners who conceive through alternative insemination is that they have made the decision before having the child that the role of each partner in parenting will be equal. They enter motherhood with this arrangement, and the way they frame their thinking about the responsibilities of each person is more similar to the decision making involved in two-biological-parent families. They are both involved in the insemination process, from selecting the sperm donor to finding a medical professional to assist with the procedure. They have a similarly vested interest in the child. The biological mother in these families wants her partner to be legitimated in larger society as the parent, she wants their child to see her partner in that way, and in order for the household to run smoothly, she herself wants to see her partner in that way.[21]

Thirty-four of my respondents were partnered and cohabiting but did not have children living with them in the home. Eighty-five percent, or twenty-nine respondents, agreed or strongly agreed that "both mates in a relationship should divide evenly the household tasks." Just as in the stepfamilies and alternative insemination families, there was a gap between their theoretical support for an egalitarian division of housework and their actual daily behavior. There is some suggestion, however, that these partners organized at least some of the family labor according to gendered presentations of self. Women with a self-defined feminine gender presentation reported spending an average of 5.2 hours per week on chores and said their partners spent about 1.5 hours less per week, or an average of 3.7 hours, on household tasks. Women with a less feminine gender presentation reported spending an average of 5.9 hours per week on chores and said their partners spent a similar amount of time on chores, 5.7 hours per week. We see here that in households with no children present, the more feminine-looking partner perceived herself to be spending more time on household chores, while the less feminine partner perceived them to be spending equal amounts of time on housework.

When respondents with no children were asked how often they performed certain household tasks, about one-third of them reported spending similar amounts of time as their partners on many chores, including washing dishes, arranging daily meals, and straightening the living room. When tasks were not performed equally by partners, there was no consistent relationship between gender presentation and the *daily* housework partners performed. The less feminine partner, however, was

TABLE 2. DIVISION OF LABOR IN LESBIAN COUPLES WITH NO CHILDREN: CERTAIN HOUSEHOLD TASKS ARE NECESSARY TO KEEP THINGS RUNNING SMOOTHLY. WHO DOES EACH OF THESE TASKS MORE OFTEN?

Household Chores	We Do This Equally (%)	More Feminine Partner Does This More (%)	Less Feminine Partner Does This More (%)
Washes dishes	33	38	30
Does laundry	26	33	52
Cleans bathroom	19	35	46
Cleans floors	26	32	42
Arranges daily meals	30	42	27
Straightens family room	31	32	36
Dusts furniture	27	40	33
Grocery shopping	59	15	23
Mixes drinks for company	27	40	32
Takes out trash	27	24	48
Repairs things around house	12	36	52
Cares for pets	36	31	32
Performs yard work	0	27	56

more likely to perform certain *infrequent* tasks that are male stereotyped, like taking out the trash, making household repairs, and performing yard work (these patterns are shown in Table 2).

CONCLUSION

The very creation of and participation in what we have defined as "family" encourages pre-established gendered patterns of interaction, even in same-sex unions. The institutional characteristics of structures we identify as family are so steeped in gendered relations that efforts to construct and participate in them result in scripts of actions that more often than not carry established gendered meanings. Addressing how housework, paid work, money management, and child rearing are negotiated among same-sex couples—couples who have developed a lesbian identity outside of the feminist egalitarian framework—sheds important light on gender construction, gendered interaction, power, and hierarchy within familial relationships. These findings have important implications, and not just for same-sex partners. Rather, if resources beyond income have the potential to influence authority and interactions within families headed by same-sex couples, they likely have this potential in heterosexual unions as well.

Control over domestic labor can be associated with greater family power for lesbians actively engaged in creating structures identified as families. Even in same-sex unions, gender profoundly influences the construction of family life, motivating the greater involvement of biological mothers in housework and child care in exchange for greater decision making in the household. The construction of "appropriate" gender norms may be particularly important for lesbian mothers who bore their children in heterosexual contexts, because they have willingly moved from validated relationships with men to sanctioned, often stigmatized, same-sex unions. Social demands produce or offer an incentive to enact behaviors that signal they are good mothers, and lesbians seeking to minimize stigma have an additional motivation to promote themselves as good mothers to family members, society, and to themselves.

Without the gender structure of male privilege, and absent the material advantage of high income differentials, the management of household activities in lesbian relationships can be a source of power. Biological mothers want more influence over the household since such control is typically seen as quite consequential to the well-being of children—children whom biological mothers see as primarily theirs and not their partners'. They use the "doing" of housework and authority over child rearing as a trade-off for significant control of household finances and organization. This has implications for how we think about the creation of hierarchies and the enactment of power in lesbian couples, of course—but arguably in heterosexual couples as well. If family relationships dictate that mothers be highly involved in the supervision and monitoring of children, as well as in the daily decision making that affects children's lives, we should expect similar pressures to conform to these gendered expectations among all women who are mothers, regardless of the sex of their partners. Bio-moms in heterosexual families likely see their greater family power in home life as important. The authority to schedule tasks, regulate activities, and keep the house running smoothly may go unnoticed or be underappreciated. Women's greater management over these areas, however, is consistent with self and societal definitions of what it means to be a "good mother." It is also possible that the ideological power of male privilege or male comparative income advantage may lessen the status women (and men) attribute to family power. Both possibilities are deserving of further consideration in research on family forms of all types. Future work should more closely analyze how women and men feel about women's greater family power in heterosexual households

and the extent to which either person interprets the wife's authority in this domain as a type of power in their households.

This chapter has also shown that bio-moms in lesbian relationships often cast their partners in traditional stepparent roles, complete with less child-rearing power, and put themselves in the middle between their children and their partners. Unlike stepfathers in heterosexual households, however, lesbian partners have less access to economic providership to leverage their position in the household, and lack a legal tie to the children in the home, which makes them less powerful actors. This relationship appears to be different relative to lesbian households wherein the children are conceived or adopted into the existing relationship, although in times of family instability or relationship dissolution the biological mother in these families may also try to exert control over her partner vis-à-vis visitation rights and other areas of the co-mother's relationship to the children.

A related insight is that the conventional model in which individuals in families exchange domestic services for financial support may not hold in certain contexts. At the greatest income disparities between partners, the economic advantages of a very high wage earner may award that person more authority in decisions over family finances. In most cases, however, the earnings differential between female partners is not so large (Peplau and Huppin 2008), and this is different from what Hofferth and Anderson (2003) find among heterosexual partners in their study of (mostly White) stepfamily and cohabiting households. The threshold at which relative differences in income influence authority in lesbian relationships remains unclear. However, there may exist an alternative kind of power in relations between women: the ability to have the final say over decisions in domestic life. More generally, it suggests the presence of power differentials that are not centered around income but instead around other expectations and identities that reveal themselves in the context of attempts to create something defined as "family."